Colorize a Black and White Photo in Photoshop

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**The process of turning a black and white photo into color can be tricky, depending on the photo you’re working with. Adding color is simple. The tricky bit is the selection process. Without any color, objects have a tendency to blend with each other. This tutorial is meant to demonstrate the process of adding color to a black and white photo. While the image I chose to use is a fairly simple example, this method will work on most black and white photos.**

Step 1

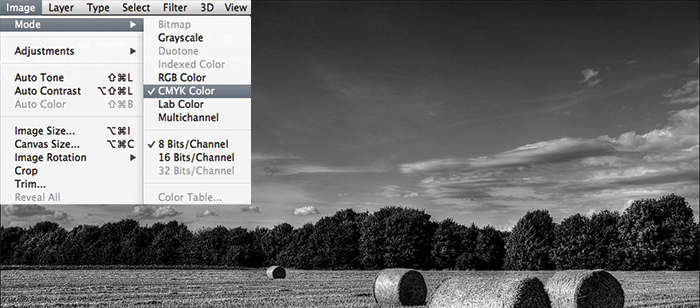
**Image selection is your first step. There’s only one condition; the photo must be black and white. Some photos will work better than others, but most should do the trick. The image used in this tutorial was found through Flickr’s Creative Commons search.**



**[](http://www.flickr.com/photos/romtomtom/4804177887/)**

Step 2: Important!

**This step is very important. If you want strong, realistic results, convert your image to CMYK. This will allow you to work with your colors a lot more effectively. To convert your image, head to Image > Mode > CMYK Color.**

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Step 3

**Now the fun begins! Your task at this point is to create a selection of a color that doesn’t exist! Whether it’s the sky, the grass, or a shirt, you need to use your imagination, and knowledge of the world to determine which objects have what color, and where they start and end. Photoshop includes a variety of selection methods that you can use during this step. For areas of a similar shade, the Quick Selection Tool may work well, otherwise, the Lasso Tools, or the Pen Tool may help with the ‘hard to get’ areas.**

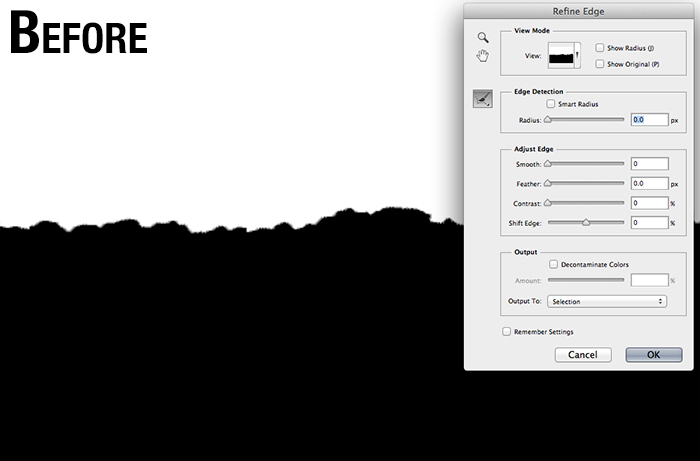
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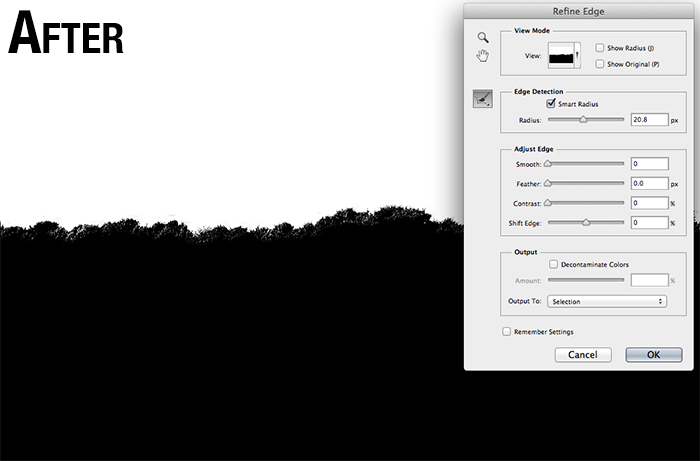
**The sky was selected using the Quick Selection Tool**

Step 4

**Once the initial selection has been made, it may be a good idea to Refine it’s edge, especially if you’re dealing with trees or hair. Under the Select menu, Photoshop’sRefine Edge feature is fantastic for dealing with rough edges, like trees and hair.**

**Notice in the image below, before turning on Smart Radius, and increasing the Radius, the selection was very rough. After, it’s a whole other story. Photoshop was able to refine the selection to go in-between the small gaps, which you usually wouldn’t be able to get to.**

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Step 5

**When you accept the refined selection, your ‘marching ants’ probably won’t look any different, but they are. It’s time to add color! We’re going to be using a Curves Adjustment Layer, as it allows us to individually edit each channel, and by using an Adjustment Layer, we’re able to edit the adjustment at a later time, if needed.**

**In your Layers Panel, click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom, then select Curves.**

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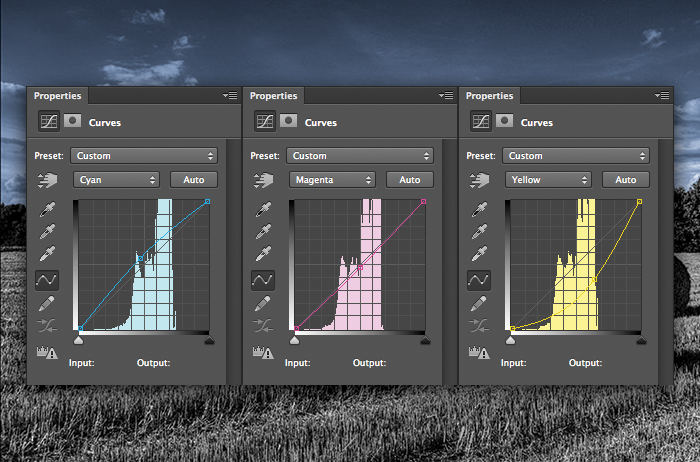
Step 6

**Because you had an active selection, your new Curves Adjustment Layer will automatically add a Layer Mask that reflects your selection. Your Properties panel, orAdjustments panel in earlier versions, will update to show the Curves adjustment, where you can choose any of the channels to edit.**

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Step 7

**Each object in your image will require a different combination of Curves adjustments. For example, the image below shows how I achieved a blue sky by editing the Cyan, Magenta, and Yellow channels.**

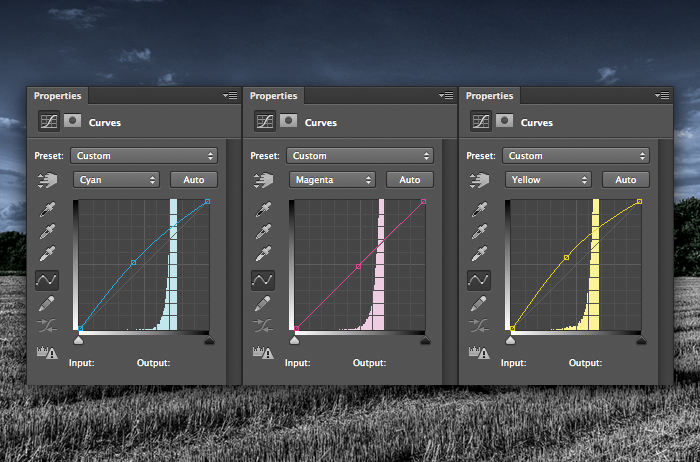
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Step 8

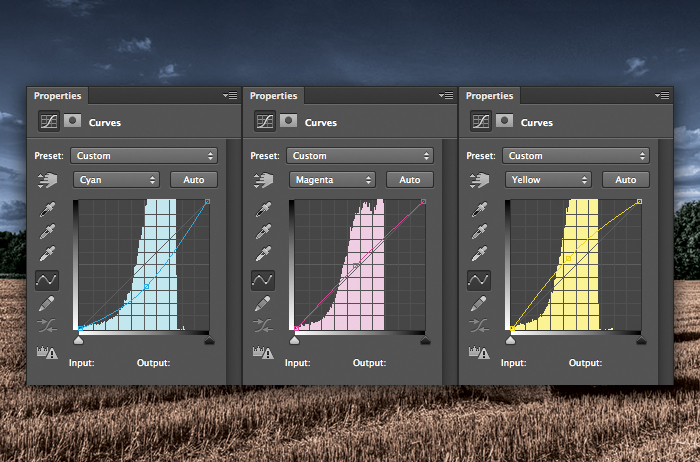
**When your first Adjustment Layer is complete, you want to repeat the same process for the other objects in your image. (Create a selection, refine the selection, add a Curves Adjustment Layer).**

**The following settings allowed me to turn the trees green:**

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**And these allowed me to turn the field and haystacks ‘golden’:**

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**Here is what the image looks like after all three Adjustment Layers have been applied:**

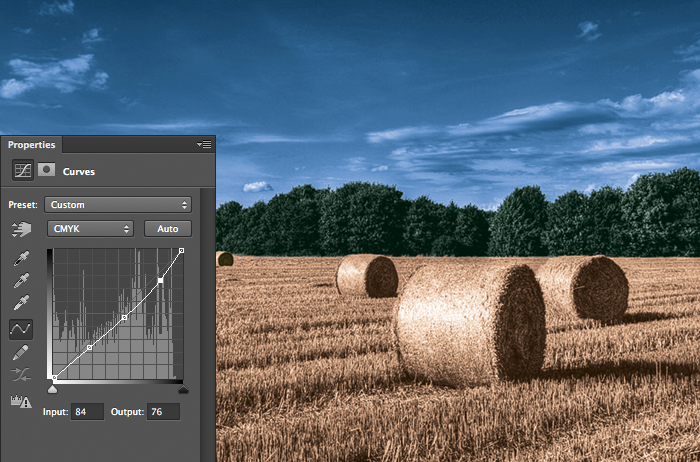
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Step 9

**When all the elements in your image have been colorized, you may want to add a few more Adjustment Layers above the current layers to boost the colors, and to sharpen the overall image. A Hue/Saturation Adjustment Layer can help you boost your colors by increasing the Saturation slider.**

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**Then another Curves Adjustment Layer can help tweak the tones of the image. You may only need to edit the CMYK channel.**

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Step 10

**That will do it! Again, this tutorial should demonstrate the method to colorize your images. Yes, a ‘simple’ image was used, but hopefully it helped you understand the steps needed to complete the process. Here is another example using the same method:**

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